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ABSTRACT

Orientation, in terms of the group discussion process, is the attempt to assist in achieving the group goals by using facts, making helpful suggestions, or resolving conflicts. Orientation behavior has been shown to relate in a causal manner to group consensus. This study reports significantly high positive correlations between orientation behavior and source credibility in discussions. Analyses of variance suggest a causal relationship between orientation behavior and source credibility. The author suggests additional study to further identify the factors of source credibility in the small group communications environment. (Author/RN)

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ORIENTATION AND CREDIBILITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR A CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP

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Speech Communication scholars have traditionally viewed consensus as one of the major goals of group discussion. Only recently, however, has research been undertaken to identify the variables related to small group consensus. Gouran (1969) found several variables which sometime distinguish the discussion behavior of consensus groups from non-consensus groups. One of these variables, called orientation, was related to consensus. Gouran defined orientation as ". . . an attempt . . . to facilitate achievement of a group's goal by using facts, making helpful suggestions, or trying to resolve conflict (p. 11). However, one cannot determine from the results of the Gouran study whether the relationship between orientation was causal or simply correlative. Knutson (1971) investigated this problem and found that behavior providing orientation in group discussions of questions of policy increased the probability of achieving consensus. Thus, orientation behavior has been shown to relate causally to consensus.'

Since a group's goal is of importance to the participants in a discussion, behavior designed to facilitate achievement of that goal ought to increase a source's credibility. Andersen and Clevenger (1963) defined ethos or source credibility as "the image held of a communicator at a given time by a receiver - - either one person or a group (p. 59). Velma Lashbrook (1971) in a review of the source credibility research conducted since 1963 reported that a source can significantly affect the receiver's ratings of credibility by manipulating

such variables as sincerity, poise, dynamism, trustworthiness, competence, and objectivity. Knutson (1971) found that orientation behavior consistantly appeared in the literature as a dimension of group interaction. Therefore, it was reasoned, orientation behavior would correlate highly and positively with source credibility.

Data for analysis were drawn from thirty small group discussions consisting of five people, four subjects and the investigator's confederate employed to manipulate orientation. Prior to the discussions, the confederate was trained in discussion format, the meaning of statements giving orientation would be appropriate. Upon appearing at the testing location, each group was randomly assigned to one of three treatment conditions High Orientation, Low Orientation, or no Orientation. In the High Orientation condition, the confederate attempted to resolve conflict, make helpful suggestions, reinforce agreement, and encourage participation. In the Low Orientation condition, the confederate withheld information, insisted that no agreement could be reached, and discouraged participation. In the No Orientation condition, the confederate remained silent unless spoken to directly. Knutson (1971) demonstrated that this manipulation of orientation was successful and that the subjects perceive the variations in orientation behavior.

Groups were allowed thirty minutes to discuss the issue, then the investigator asked the subjects for the credibility and orientation ratings. Perceived credibility of the confederate was measured on a set of factors developed by Whitehead for use in credibility research (1969).

Four factors were used in making the credibility judgments. Trustworthiness, Competence, Dynamism, and Objectivity. A seven-point scale was used to measure each of the factors, with a higher numerical rating representing a higher degree of the property in question. Orientation behavior of the confederate was measured on a seven-point scale with a numerically low rating representing low orientation.

The subjects' ratings of the confederate's orientation behavior were correlated with the subjects' ratings of the confederate's source credibility as measured by the four factors mentioned above by means of the Pearson r (Williams, p. 128). To determine how strong the relationships might have been under conditions of perfect reliability, the procedures described by Guilford were employed to correct the coefficients (Guilford, 1954). The results of these analyses appear in Table 1.

TABLE 1

CORRELATION AND CORRECT CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS (N=120) FOR SUBJECTS' RATINGS OF THE CONFEDERATES' ORIENTATION BEHAVIOR AND FOUR FACTORS OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY

Relationship	r	$r_{corr.}$	P
1. Orientation. Competence	+.8065	+.87	.01
2. Orientation: Dynamism	+.7912	+.87	.01
3. Orientation: Objectivity	+.7514	+.93	.01
4. Orientation: Trustworthiness	+.6943	+.92	.01

Since the correlation figures ranged from a low of +.6943 to a high of +.8065, Fisher's Z test was used to determine whether the orientation variable was more strongly related to one factor of source credibility than to any of the others (Blommers and Lindquist, 1960). Table 2 summarizes these results.

TABLE 2

TEST OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCE AMONG THE CORRELATIONS (N=240

Comparison	Z	P
1. Competence:Orientation-Dynamism:Orientation	0.13074402	n.s.
2. Competence:Orientation-Objectivity:Orientation	1.06852305	n.s.
3. Competence:Orientation-Trustworthiness:Orientation	1.95110262	n.s.
4. Dynamism:Orientation-Objectivity:Orientation	0.75319593	n.s.
5. Dynamism:Orientation-Trustworthiness.Orientation	1.63577428	n.s.
6. Objectivity:Orientation-Trustworthiness:Orientation	0.88257834	n.s.

Since there were no significant differences among the correlation coefficients, one can assume that they, in fact, are of approximately the same magnitude. Orientation behavior is highly and positively correlated with each of the four factors of source credibility.

Of course, these data do not prove the existence of a causal relationship between giving orientation and being perceived as highly credible;

however, they do suggest this relationship. In order to reduce the speculation about the nature of this relationship, several a posteriori comparisons were made. Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test as described by Runyon and Haber (1971) was employed to analyze mean differences on the four factors of source credibility across the three orientation conditions. Since these comparisons were not planned in advance, four simple analyses of variance were made to determine whether the differences among the treatment means were significant. Table 3 presents the results of these analyses.

TABLE 3

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF FOUR FACTORS OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY IN THREE ORIENTATION CONDITIONS

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
(Trustworthiness)					
Between Groups	206.950	2	103.475	38.437	.01
Within Groups	314.975	117	2.692		
(Competence)					
Between Groups	471.200	2	235.600	172.60	.01
Within Groups	159.725	117	1.365		
(Dynamism)					
Between Groups	556.017	2	278.008	254.586	.01
Within Groups	127.850	117	1.092		
(Objectivity)					
Between Groups	322.017	2	161.008	65.291	.01
Within Groups	288.575	117	2.466		

The significance of the four overall F-ratios enabled the application of the HSD. The results of the Tukey Procedure of multiple comparisons employed to identify which of the twelve two-treatment comparisons would yield significant differences are presented in Table 4.

These post hoc analyses reveal that variations of orientation behavior were associated with corresponding variations in the dependent measure. A confederate behaving in a manner rated high on orientation was rated significantly higher on all four factors of source credibility than a confederate engaging in either low or no orientation behavior. A confederate in the low orientation condition was rated significantly higher on credibility than a no orientation confederate. Therefore, the data seem to provide substantial support for additional research designed to determine experimentally whether variations in orientation behavior actually cause variations in ratings of source credibility. The present study can be viewed as a pilot study to justify this additional investigation.

As pointed out above, these data do not prove a causal relationship between orientation behavior and ratings of source credibility. However, the size of the correlation coefficients and the strength of the post hoc analyses of variance strongly suggest a causal relationship. One can reason that, since members of the groups were unacquainted prior to the discussions, the confederate's initial credibility would be low or, at least, neutral. The subsequent ratings on source credibility would be influenced heavily by the confederate's verbal behavior during the discussion. It seems plausible, therefore, that the intentional manipulation of orientation behavior does, in fact, affect the ratings of the confederate's credibility.

TABLE 4

MULTIPLE COMPARISONS (TUKEY) AMONG THE MEAN CREDIBILITY RATINGS IN THREE ORIENTATION CONDITIONS*

Trustworthiness	$\bar{X}_{ho}$	$\bar{X}_{lo}$	$\bar{X}_{no}$
$\bar{X}_{ho}$ = 6.150	. . .	1.075*	2.800**
$\bar{X}_{lo}$ = 5.075	. . .	. . .	2.725**
$\bar{X}_{no}$ = 2.350	. . .	. . .	. . .

*Significant at the .05 level of confidence. The minimum mean difference necessary for significance is .87024.
**Significant at the .01 level of confidence. The minimum mean difference necessary for significance is 1.0878.

Competence	$\bar{X}_{ho}$	$\bar{X}_{lo}$	$\bar{X}_{no}$
$\bar{X}_{ho}$ = 6.225	. . .	1.300**	4.700**
$\bar{X}_{lo}$ = 4.925	. . .	. . .	3.400**
$\bar{X}_{no}$ = 1.525	. . .	. . .	. . .

**Significant at the .01 level of confidence. The minimum mean difference necessary for significance is .7770.

Dynamism	$\bar{X}_{ho}$	$\bar{X}_{lo}$	$\bar{X}_{no}$
$\bar{X}_{ho}$ = 6.375	. . .	1.000**	5.000**
$\bar{X}_{lo}$ = 5.375	. . .	. . .	4.000**
$\bar{X}_{no}$ = 1.375	. . .	. . .	. . .

**Significant at the .01 level of confidence. The minimum mean difference necessary for significance is .6930.

Objectivity	$\bar{X}_{ho}$	$\bar{X}_{lo}$	$\bar{X}_{no}$
$\bar{X}_{ho}$ = 6.150	. . .	2.275**	4.000**
$\bar{X}_{lo}$ = 3.875	. . .	. . .	1.725**
$\bar{X}_{no}$ = 2.150	. . .	. . .	. . .

**Significant at the .01 level of confidence. The minimum mean difference necessary for significance is 1.0416.

*$\bar{X}_{ho}$ represents the mean credibility rating in the high orientation condition, $\bar{X}_{lo}$ refers to the low orientation mean, and $\bar{X}_{no}$ refers to the no orientation mean.

Studies concerning source credibility have increased considerably in recent years. The results of this line of research have given some general guidelines to communication scientists interested in public address situations, but little effort has been made to investigate the operation of credibility in small groups. In light of Andersen and Clevenger's (1963) admonition to engage in multivariate analyses, this lack of concern is somewhat perplexing. The dimensions of source credibility in task-oriented, problem-solving small groups should be determined through factor analysis. As Velma Lashbrook (1971, p.3) notes the similarity of the sources, receivers and situations in source credibility research seriously inhibits the generalizability of the dimensions of source credibility. Work presently being done by McCroskey (1971) represents an attempt to develop measurements applicable to different communication environments. A similar approach should be undertaken with small group credibility.

Obviously, additional investigations are needed to investigate further the results of the present study. One possible direction would be to study the effectiveness of a source rated low on credibility but engaging in high orientation behavior. In other words, can a source with low credibility manifesting high orientation be as effective as a source with high credibility operating in a similar fashion?

The identification of the factors of source credibility for small groups and a further investigation of the orientation-credibility relationship could lead to profitable payoffs in the understanding of conflict management, decision-making, and consensus.

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